

Head Lice

Description: wingless insects that live on the human scalp – **they can't fly**

- : they are unsightly, itchy, and embarrassing to many, but they don't carry disease
- : infestations are not rare – 6 to 12 million people are infested every year in the United States, most of these are children
- : infestation is **not** related to hygiene, social status, hair length, or neglect
- : most likely transmitted by sharing coats, hats, and combs; you can get head lice from direct head-to-head contact with individuals who have lice
- : they don't prefer individuals with long hair, although girls are more commonly infested which probably is indicative of their increased likelihood of close play with their friends
- : more common in white than in black children – appears to be harder for the lice to attach to the oval hair shafts of black children

Signs and Symptoms: quite possibly none, but many complain of an itchy scalp

- : usually infected for over 1 month before symptoms are noted
- : secondary bacterial infection is possible if the scalp is vigorously scratched

Checking For Head Lice:

live lice are not easy to find and they tend to hide

- : requires a bright light, a fine toothed comb, a meticulous search method, and a lot of patience
- : adult females are as big as a sesame seed and either tan, gray, or reddish-brown
- : most likely place to find the eggs is behind the ears and at the nape of the neck
- : eggs are small, translucent, and firmly glued to the hair shaft close to the scalp
- : nits, which are the empty shells of hatched eggs, are easier to see because they reflect light and are further out on the hair shaft
- : scalp itching without evidence of live lice or eggs is **not** diagnostic of an infestation

Treatment

For individuals under 2 months or for a non-medicinal treatment

- : shaving the scalp is a safe, quick, 100 percent effective cure

For individuals 2 months of age and older

- : shampoo the hair with a non-cream rinse based shampoo such as Prell
- : rinse well and towel dry
- : shake the bottle of Nix thoroughly and then apply enough to saturate the hair and scalp
- : after 10 minutes, thoroughly rinse the hair and scalp with water
- : comb the hair thoroughly to remove the lice eggs – this takes time but it is a crucial step; don't rush this part since any eggs left behind can hatch and start a new infestation
- : inspect the scalp and hair daily for 2 to 3 days to remove any eggs you may have missed
- : treatment schedule options are days 1 and 9 or days 1, 7, and 14

Many treatment failures are probably due to a failure to adequately follow the above steps, rather than resistance of the lice to the medicine

Antibiotics such as Bactrim and covering the scalp/hair overnight utilizing a shower cap and petroleum jelly have not been adequately studied

Sterilizing the clothes and possessions **may** be helpful, but the lice don't live long away from the warmth of the scalp.

- 1) if possible, all combs and brushes should be washed and then boiled in water for 10 minutes
- 2) all washable clothing, bedding, stuffed animals, etc. that the individual has recently been in contact with should be put through a high-heat dryer cycle for 20 minutes first and then through a wash cycle
- 3) dry cleaning or sealing items in a plastic bag for 2 weeks are also effective options
- 4) a thorough vacuuming of any areas of the car and home that the individual recently has been in contact with, including under furniture cushions, are probably not beneficial; the vacuum bag should be removed and disposed of outdoors; I am not aware of any evidence that furniture/rug sprays are effective or necessary

****Lice treatments are safe, but they are pesticides and should therefore be treated with respect – DON'T use them if it is not indicated****

An excellent 24 hour reference source is the Nix Hot Line – 888/542-3546